



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

January 30, 2012

18th Legislative District
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Isiah Leggett
Dear Senator Madaleno and Delegates Carr, Gutierrez and Waldstreicher:

Thank you for copying me on your letter of January 20, 2012 to MDOT Secretary Swaim-Staley urging the postponement of the State Highway Administration's project to improve traffic operations at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Jones Bridge Road. I appreciate having this opportunity to comment on your letter.

The SHA project was designed over several years of deliberations between State and County transportation officials and community stakeholders to respond to dramatic increases in traffic resulting from the 2005 federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) law. BRAC mandated the closure of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in northwest Washington, D.C., with most of its functions and personnel being relocated to the campus of the National Naval Medical Center. The consolidation of these two iconic military medical institutions in September, 2011, created the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda and increased personnel at the Bethesda campus from 8,000 to 10,500 -- an increase of nearly 33 percent -- and doubled the number of visits to the campus from 500,000 to one million per year.

Prior to BRAC, all the major intersections that serve the Bethesda medical center area were already at Level of Service F, or failing, including the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Jones Bridge Road. The Environmental Impact Study (EIS) the Navy conducted for BRAC-related construction included a traffic study coordinated with State and County officials. The traffic study determined that traffic in the area would be even worse -- bad enough, in fact, that the Department of Defense eventually provided more than \$28 million in Defense Access Road (DAR) funding to help mitigate traffic at its main gate.

As you stated, the Navy is currently conducting an EIS for new construction on the campus and will include the results of a post-BRAC traffic study when the Draft EIS is released later this year. The scope of work for this construction includes new and renovated medical buildings and two new parking garages with approximately 900 spaces. Even with Transportation Demand Management practices instituted by the Navy to promote transit ridership and decreased the use of single occupancy vehicles, it is reasonable to conclude that post-BRAC traffic at the Medical Center will only get worse. Therefore, inaction is not an option. We must get moving to prevent a traffic nightmare.

To that end, last year our congressional delegation displayed extraordinary leadership to secure a \$90 million appropriation to help construct BRAC traffic mitigation projects at the Medical Center Metro Station and at four major intersections along Rockville Pike, Cedar Lane, Connecticut Avenue, Jones Bridge Road, and Old Georgetown Road. All totaled, State and County transportation agencies now have almost \$170 million from Federal, State, and County sources to fully fund these and other projects. Efforts to postpone any of the projects would be an affront to our delegation's hard work.

Efforts to postpone any of the projects would also be an affront to State and County transportation officials, the Navy, and local stakeholders who have worked together for years to achieve consensus on all these projects. The intersections projects and the Metro Station project complement each other and will succeed if they are all constructed. These projects were discussed openly at regular meetings of the BRAC Implementation Committee (BIC), the community body that has advised me since 2007.

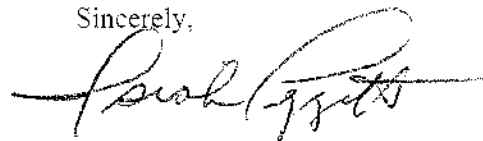
Overall, the project at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Jones Bridge Road is a win-win for neighborhood residents and regional commuters. When it is completed, the project at this intersection will include a new southbound lane from the Beltway allowing dedicated right turns onto Jones Bridge Road, and measures to improve access to the Beltway from Jones Bridge Road. This will help mitigate gridlock on Connecticut Avenue, Jones Bridge Road, and the Beltway.

The State Highway Administration and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation worked closely with the Chevy Chase Valley (CCV) neighborhood that would be directly impacted by the project. CCV residents acknowledged the need to mitigate dramatic traffic growth and agreed to support the project as long as certain safety measures were put in place, including a first-ever traffic signal to provide safe access to the neighborhood and barriers to prevent cut-through traffic while permitting egress for local traffic. These safety measures are in place.

Your point about the anticipated construction of a Countywide Rapid Transit system is well taken. There is no stronger advocate for Rapid Transit in Montgomery County than I. But instituting a Rapid Transit system and mitigating BRAC traffic are not mutually exclusive. We can do both -- and we must. The BRAC-related projects at the four intersections are considered relatively low-impact construction. For the most part they will improve vehicular and pedestrian movement and avoid untenable gridlock, but I have been assured they would not preclude the installation of dedicated transit lanes.

Again, I appreciate being able to comment on your letter to Secretary Swaim-Staley and look forward to working with you on transportation and other matters of mutual concern.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isiah Leggett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Isiah Leggett
County Executive